



Vocalist, composer, playwright, and actor Somi Kakoma was raised between Illinois and Zambia, and is the daughter of immigrants from Uganda and Rwanda. Known in the jazz world simply as 'Somi', *The New York Times* recently described her as “a virtuosic performer in full command of her instrument and powers.” In March 2022, Somi released her fifth studio album *Zenzile: The Reimagination of Miriam Makeba*, an all-star tribute album honoring the great South African artist and activist in commemoration of what would have been the late singer’s 90th birthday. The album, which featured special guests Gregory Porter, Seun Kuti, Angelique Kidjo, Nduduzo Makhathini, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, and Thandiswa Mazwai won an inaugural Jazz Music Award for Best Vocal Performance. As a companion project to the album, Somi also penned and starred in the critically-acclaimed original musical about Makeba called “Dreaming Zenzile” that toured nationally and Off-Broadway last season. Prior to the *Zenzile* album, Somi released an unplanned live album called ‘Holy Room’ featuring the Frankfurt Radio Big Band at the height of the 2020 global lockdown. The album ultimately earned her a 2021 Grammy® nomination for Best Jazz Vocal Album, making her the first African woman ever nominated in any of the Grammy® jazz categories. The album also won an NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Jazz Vocal Album. Her previous studio album *Petite Afrique*, which also won an NAACP Image Award, tells the story of the vibrant African immigrant community in midst of a rapidly gentrifying Harlem in New York City and was the highly anticipated follow up to Somi's critically acclaimed major label debut, *The Lagos Music Salon*. Somi recently made her acting debut on Broadway in the title role of a new play called “Jaja’s African Hair Braiding” by Joceyln Bioh.

Closely mentored by the legendary trumpet player Hugh Masekela, Somi has carved out her own path as an artist, scholar, and activist. A recipient of the 2023 Doris Duke Artist Award, Somi is also a Soros Equality Fellow, a United States Artist Fellow, a TED Senior Fellow, a Sundance Theatre Fellow, and a former artist-in-residence at Park Avenue Armory, Captiva at the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, Baryshnikov Arts Center, and UCLA’s Center for the Art of Performance. She is also the founder of Salon Africana, a boutique cultural agency and record label. Often celebrated for the socio-political messages inherent to her original songwriting, Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon asked Somi to perform at the United Nations’ General Assembly in commemoration of the *International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade*. Somi holds undergraduate degrees in Cultural Anthropology and African Studies from University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, a Master’s degree in Performance Studies from Tisch School of the Arts at New York University, and is currently working on her PhD at Harvard University’s Department of Music. In her heart of hearts, she is an East African Midwestern girl who loves family, poetry, and freedom. www.somimusic.com @somimusic